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An

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W. L. H.

Hypochondriasis

By

Thomas P. Bagwell Virg.a

— Ut sit Mens sana, in Corpore sano. Juv.

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Hypochondriasis.

This disease as will readily be supposed not less from the causes which are known to produce it, than from the peculiarities of its nature, must have been noticed from the earliest times; and like many others has been handed down through the clamour and confusion of medical revolutions still wearing the garb of uncertainty. The opinions of disease entertained by the first cultivators of physic must necessarily have been founded much on the broad basis of speculation and hypothesis, and in viewing the list of diseases, and their gradual developement from their original state of uncertainty, to the far more correct and established notions of modern times, we find but few that have opened a wider

field for the production of new and fanciful theories than hypochondriasis. — This name by general consent is given to a disease principally characterized by an anxious and apprehensive state of mind in respect to the patients health, and by an imaginary suffering of many morbid affections, together with a derangement of some of the Chylopoietic Viscera, generally the stomach. The name given to this affection is generally believed to have originated in the uneasy sensations which hypochondriacs feel in that region of the abdomen called by anatomists the hypochondria: in support of the opinion that this name was given to the disease as indicative of its seat, it was called Miachia by the Arabians from Miach the abdomen or belly; the opinion once prevalent that the spleen was the seat of the

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disease, gave occasion to the use of the name of that Viscus to designate the disorder, and the opinion that this singular affection of the Mind originated in Vapours arising from a collection of feculent and offensive Matter in the Spleen and first passages gave origin to the term - Vapours.

It would be impossible to give a regular detail of all the symptoms of a disease so varying and uncertain in its phenomena as hypochondriasis; on this subject we hope it will suffice to say, that after a series of symptoms evincing a deranged State of the bodily health generally, but particularly of the organs of digestion, a State of Mind succeeds Marked by the following symptoms, languor, a want of resolution in all undertakings, a sadness and timidity, a constant dread of evil, and of the most unhappy consequences from the

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very slightest grounds; the patient fancies him=
=self afflicted with every disorder, and is
displeased with any person who would
persuade him to the contrary; and finally
if not arrested in its progress, a depraved imag=
=ination arises productive of the most sing=
=ular sensations and erroneous ideas.
This disease occurs principally in advanc=
=ed life and persons of a melancholic
temperament are peculiarly liable to it;
the habits and occupation have also great
influence in the propagation of the disorder;
those leading sedentary lives, the studious
as well as the indolent and the idle are
apt to be the subjects of its influence; one
great peculiarity of this disease, is its
rapid progress when once established: it
at first appears to consist only in a wrong
or mistaken idea which unless timely

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connected soon multiplies, and ultimately ends in a deprived and vitiated imagination which big with the most unfounded forebodings load the sufferer with great distress and misery; it is said that hypochondriacs are worse in autumn and in winter than in the other seasons of the year, in some measure I suppose, the effect of an impression made on the mind by a view of the surrounding objects, for the sudden change of the beauties of spring into the gloomy and desolate show of winter is certainly very calculated to fill the mind with solemn and melancholy thoughts.

After a continuance of this course of things viz. the dejection of spirits, the great care of their health, anxiety as to all their concerns, as much as to every sensation, for an indefinite period, diseased perceptions arise in

which they form the most unreasonable notions and to which they adhere with the strictest pertinacity; some like the heroine described by Tulpius supposing themselves made of a fragile substance liable to be broken by the slightest touch, while others like the brother of Marcus Tullius gave to stand erect lest their legs bend under them; with these and many other notions equally chimerical strongly rivited in their minds they cannot but suffer the greatest anxiety. In others the disease verges on melancholy and in these cases we sometimes meet with suicide.

In hypochondrias as well as in many other diseases there is much discrepancy of opinion among writers as regards its real nature; but as regards the correctness of their respective views of the pathology of the disease I shall say nothing, and only notice some

of the principal. It has been observed by all writers on the disease that it is invariably connected with more or less derangement of of some one of the Chylopoietic Viscera, and it is this observation which has probably given rise to the different opinions which have existed relative to its nature.

Some suppose the seat of the disease to depend on a direct loss of sensorial power induced by various remote causes, as the remembrance of some important loss or disappointment, close study, excessive venery, sedentary habits, long continued evacuations &c. and that the affections of the abdominal viscera which are concomitant and generally viewed in the relation of causes are but symptomatic; they believe that the disponding passions are for the most part the exciting causes, acting through the medium

of the brain, and this they adduce as an argument in favour of the sympathetic nature of the disease; or rather of the mental affection. Cullen whose doctrines and opinions are viewed as the standard of modern times believed that this state of mind is invariably connected with an affection of the stomach. But at the same time he says that dyspepsia is equally sure to be attended with a certain affection of the mind; he is far however from confounding the two diseases for he believes the gastric affection in hypochondriasis to be entirely different from dyspepsia; in order then for the author above quoted to distinguish the two diseases and arrive at a certainty of the existance of hypochondriasis he has particular reference to the age and temperament of the patient; he thinks this

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disease almost exclusively confined to those advanced in life and of a melancholic temperament. While dyspepsia generally occurs in the vigour of life and to those of a sanguine temperament; these mental variations attending the dyspepsia of sanguine temperaments, he thinks are for the most part slight, and on the other hand in the disease as it occurs in the melancholic the gastric symptoms are equally slight and more dependant on the temperament; he thinks also that the state of mind is different in the two cases, and that when the mental affection of the young and sanguine resembles the disease he would call hypochondriasis, it must be attributed to a debilitated and changeable state of the nervous power." In a word it is the opinion of Dr. Cullen that hypochondriasis is perhaps always a primary and idiopathic disease.

Thus it is that the seat of the mental affection is confined to the abdomen, and that the disagreeable feelings, depression of spirits, distorted perceptions and strange ideas are merely the offspring of unpleasant transmitted to the brain from an uneasiness in the stomach and bowels; and this position they support by the well known fact that the disease assumes a much more troublesome type when the patients are troubled with indigestion flatulency, colic, and the like. It is stated by Doctr. Wright that the faintings, tremor, palpitations of the heart, and even the fearfulness which attend the disease, may be more frequently owing to the infirm state of the prima Via than to any defect either in the brain or heart. This evidently appears to be the most plausible doctrine of the nature of this disease yet it must be acknowledged that it is not

easy to trace the enormous perceptions of an hypochondriac to the original effect painful sensations in the body.

Among the supporters of this opinion concerning the pathology of hypochondriasis viz. that it has its origin in some of the abdominal viscera may be mentioned the name of Crichton the author of "An Inquiry into the origin and nature of Mental Derangement." This author in accounting for the progress of the disease from its first symptoms and most simple form, to its full development and most aggravated shape says "A firm belief in any perception never takes place unless it acquires a certain degree of force, and we act the impressions which arise from the viscera of the abdomen are necessarily obscure we see the reason why they must continue for a certain length of time or be often repeated

before they can draw a person's attention from the ordinary impressions of external objects which are clear and distinct and before they acquire such a degree of vividness as to destroy the operations of reason". That this unhappy state of mind denominated hypochondriasis is occasioned by some disordered state of the abdominal viscera, and most generally of the stomach appears to be the popular doctrine of the present day, and in fact a late *writer has gone so far as to say "that hypochondriasis is as truly a gastric disease as any to which our systems are liable", he also goes farther and denies the existence of any mental disease whatever as purely idiopathic If then this affection of the mind has its seat in the stomach or other of the abdominal viscera we are necessarily led to enquire into the nature of this diseased state of the viscera.

* Caldwell.

and as we frequently see the stomach much disordered by indigestion and other disorders, the mind at the same time being unimpaired, it can only be ascribed to an impression the genius causes. Notwithstanding the difference of opinion which has existed as respects the nature of the diseased action almost all agree in ascribing it to the same remote causes, among which as the principal we may mention, close study, great anxiety, for the attainment of some important end or object excessive venery, sedentary habits, a constant recollection of some material loss or disappointment, improper diet long continued evacuations, to which has been added intermittent and remittent fevers.

To enumerate or mention the remote causes of this disease, would only be to recapitulate the different causes that I have before mentioned that different authors have enumerated

for [illegible] it is perhaps [illegible] could be shown that a majority of physicians in the [illegible] at times have erred in referring the symptoms to dyspepsia [illegible] to a primary affection of some one of the abdominal viscera, [illegible] the presentation of the affection we are as yet ignorant.

Diagnosis. The most perplexing disease we are most liable to confound it with is the dyspepsia, by which [illegible], there being certain symptoms common, and nearly common to each. To distinguish the schirrhosis from dyspepsia, we may at first have recourse to the age of the patient as it [illegible] is that the former is almost exclusively confined to advanced life, whilst the latter occurs principally from the age of puberty to that of thirty five; the fear of death and constant dread

of itself it can also be regarded as an important diagnostic symptom; further distinguishing the two diseases, particularly to the [illegible] temperament of the patient, which I have before spoken. By many of the former writers hypochondriasis and hysteria were considered as one and the same disease differing only as the female frame and constitution of the female differs from the more hardy and robust nature of the male, but they are now considered as distinct diseases, first I believe noticed as such by the learned and distinguished Fred. Hoffman. The spirits of the patients in the two diseases likewise afford the most distinguishing line of distinction. In hypochondriasis as has before been said the mind is fixed in gloom and sadness, exhibiting an appearance of the utmost dejection and dismay, whilst in hysteria the spirits are

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[illegible] of Mathew [illegible].
Hydrochloracid Acid is the [illegible]
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[illegible] which is almost [illegible] its concen-
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[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible]
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[illegible]. It is [illegible] that there are [illegible] diseases
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] hence there must [illegible] [illegible] difficulty
in [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible], particularly
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the
[illegible] [illegible] of the mine; it is [illegible] con-
[illegible] that in this case it is [illegible] [illegible]
the treatment in either [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

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[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] Inflammation of [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

and intervening circumstances connected by a natural chain of operation that gradually weakening the deranged and morbid concentration of action.

To cure any disease we must necessarily first inquire into the remote causes, which when known are either to be removed or avoided in the [illegible] have time to decide what are [illegible] Some of the most common of the remote causes [illegible] of what seems prompt [illegible].

Having thus sketched the [illegible] influence of what we suppose the remote cause of the disease, we are then to endeavour to remove those symptoms which arise out of the morbid state of the stomach and intervening [illegible], [illegible] of the organs lying in their vicinity and which sympathize in this derangement. It is in many of these symptoms that [illegible] met with a very

[illegible]

[illegible]

Owing to the intestinal accumulation in the stomach and the pressure of the diaphragm upon the heart, a feeling of uneasiness in the chest is a very marked and distressing symptom, this can usually be obviated or relieved by soliciting evacuations early at stated hours or by some gentle laxative, or perhaps better by an enema. From the great sympathy between the stomach and liver the bilious functions are often performed with great torpor and inactivity in this disease: when this is the case the bowels are frequently constipated, an important point in the treatment, as much as the nature of circumstances will admit to remove the dyspeptic symptoms will of course be but a very slight alleviation of the symptoms so long as the bowels are out of order; To meet this indication the most useful remedy consists in maintaining a gentle operation upon the bowels by means of Mild Mercurial preparations, instituted to the greater or less degree of torpor of the

[illegible] very [illegible]. When they [illegible] [illegible] them healthy [illegible] healthy [illegible] of the [illegible] that the [illegible]. At [illegible] thought that there [illegible] that [illegible] that there [illegible] that [illegible]. According to the [illegible] which [illegible] the pathology of the [illegible] are [illegible] fully, and in the [illegible] the following plan of treatment [illegible] this [illegible] brought [illegible]: even then [illegible] also to [illegible] the stomach and [illegible] to be noi[illegible], and [illegible] right [illegible] restore the [illegible] to [illegible] healthy [illegible] of the [illegible]

of chalybeate Water, tepid bathing, and friction of the whole body with coarse flame cloths are strongly recommended.

To conclude, we most sedulously advise the withholding of all strong or morbid stimuli from the nervous system, whether they act on the external senses or the mind; but at the same time to insist on the enjoyment of the natural stimuli; as to the circulation by exercise; to the respiration by pure air of a moderate temperature; to the skin by comfortable clothing; to the sight by the varied colours of nature's livery; to the hearing by the harmony of poetry and song; and to the brain or mind by awakening pleasurable recollections and holding out the bland allurements of hope. ———

Finis.